

VZCZCXRO4853
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0222/01 0371332
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 061332Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5208
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 0769
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000222

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: TBIO KISL PGOV PREL SOCI ECON KOCI EAID NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: GOVERNORS PROMISE TO KEEP THEIR STATES POLIO-FREE

REF: A. 08 ABUJA 2515

1B. 08 ABUJA 2129
1C. 08 ABUJA 1591
1D. 08 ABUJA 815

11. (SBU) Summary: Sustained engagement by the Ambassador and other senior staff has yielded positive results in the battle to eradicate polio in Nigeria. The Ambassador's advocacy with Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki has led the Governor's Forum to give polio eradication a priority and to engage in a more vigorous partnership with the Ministry of Health. On February 2, the Government of Nigeria (GON) and 36 states adopted a five-point strategy that mirrors the interagency recommendations that the Ambassador presented to the Governor for combating the wild polio virus (WPV), including pledging to make their states polio free. These are encouraging signs and may lead to improved results in polio eradication. The interagency recommendations are listed in par 5. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The Ambassador met on December 17 with Kwara State Governor and Governors' Forum Chair Bukola Saraki and advocated that strong local leadership was necessary for eradicating the WPV in the country (reftel A). Saraki promised to include polio on the January 28, 2009 agenda for the Governors' Forum and requested specific recommendations that would advance the fight against polio. On December 28, 2008 the Ambassador sent a letter to Saraki containing a six-point recommendation, the list of which is provided in paragraph 5 below. (Comment: Saraki as Chairman of the Nigerian Governors' Forum is playing a leading role in rallying the support of his fellow governors to stop the spread of the polio epidemic. End comment.) Saraki followed through on his promise to the Ambassador and took actions that have resulted in several pronouncements by the Governors' Forum and the GON. He also sent a follow up letter to the Ambassador. (Comment: Mission is optimistic that, if implemented, these pronouncements will result in significant progress in the fight against polio. End comment).

13. (U) The media reported on January 29 (and confirmed by GON contacts and by Saraki in a conversation with the Ambassador) that the governors at the Forum agreed to partner with the Ministry of Health to stop the polio epidemic and improve primary health care delivery at the state and local levels. In addition, the newly-appointed Minister of Health, Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, gave a presentation and offered to work more closely with the governors on polio. The governors for their part promised to remain actively engaged and encouraged Local Government Area Councils to provide leadership and periodic status updates on polio at the State Executive Council meetings. On February 2, in another positive sign of continued progress, the GON and 36 states adopted a five-point strategy that mirrors the interagency document presented by the Ambassador on combating WPV.

¶4. (U) COMMENT: Team Nigeria is encouraged that the Governors' Forum and the GON have given polio eradication top priority and adopted a strategy for tackling it. We are also pleased that the newly-appointed Minister of Health addressed the Forum and briefed governors on the polio situation and what needs to be done to combat it successfully. Mission Nigeria has worked closely with the new Minister and the leadership at the National Primary Health Care Development Agency from the time of their appointment pushing successfully for much better harmony among concerned agencies of the Nigerian government. We are optimistic that this new synergy and focus will lead to improved coordination and local ownership of the polio campaign, and ultimately in better results in disrupting the virus' spread in Nigeria. The Ambassador and other senior Mission staff will continue to engage governors, key federal officials and other stakeholders and encourage sustained action on polio.

¶5. (U) Summary of the interagency recommendations presented by the Ambassador:

-- State Polio Taskforces, through Commissioners of Health, can regularly report to their respective Governors on the polio situation in their states on the preparation for, the conduct of anti-polio campaigns, and the results achieved. They could also coordinate activities with neighboring states, the Federal Government, and donor implementing partners;

-- More advanced pre-planning as well as more state funding, particularly with transportation could help in the better execution of polio campaigns in each LGA;

-- Cold storage facilities for vaccines are needed as well as more
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training for vaccine workers. Public awareness is such a big part of the success of these campaigns, so more public mobilization by LGA authorities can help achieve better success;

-- Oversight of the campaign by senior state officials on the ground will help you assess the success of the campaigns;

-- Public recognition by Governors of LGAs that have successful campaigns can encourage better outcomes and address challenges for future successful challenges; and

-- Making routine immunization a part of your state program can have significant impact on improving the health of children. Maintenance of child health cards are key for proper immunization coverage. Incentives may need to be devised to encourage mothers to safeguard these cards, particularly for children above age one.

¶6. This cable was cleared by Consulate Lagos.

SANDERS